

D. T. Suzuki and the Invention of Tradition

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SUZUKI Daisetsu Teitarō 鈴木大拙貞太郎, or D. T. Suzuki, was born in 1870 and died in 1966. While he was alive, his many admirers lauded him highly, sometimes describing him as the living embodiment of Zen Buddhism. But in the decades after his death, academic critics in the West have castigated him severely. Robert Sharf has charged that Suzuki's account of Zen is not only a historically inaccurate "invention of tradition,"¹ but also an expression of Japanese nationalism extolling the cultural superiority of Japan as a nation and the Japanese as a race.² Bernard Faure conducted a critique of Suzuki's account of Zen from the point of view of rhetoric rather than doctrine; this critique on the one hand revealed Suzuki's sectarian biases and logical inconsistencies³ and on the other hand exposed Suzuki's account of Zen as a "secondary Orientalism."⁴ Brian Victoria has argued that although Buddhism is supposed to be a pacifist religion, the Zen school in Japan willingly supported the Japanese military's war efforts during World War II and that Suzuki actively supported the Japanese military aggression.⁵

Is Suzuki guilty of these offences? How just are these criticisms? In this paper, I would like to examine Robert Sharf's claim that Suzuki's exposition

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¹ Sharf 1995a, p. 246.

² Sharf 1993, p. 5.

³ Faure 1993, pp. 54–60.

⁴ Faure 1993, p. 5.

⁵ Victoria 1997.

of Zen is an invention of tradition and revisit Faure's notion of secondary Orientalism. I will not be dealing with the criticisms levelled by Brian Victoria.⁶ My discussion divides into two parts, the first dealing with the critique of Zen experience and the second dealing with authentic Buddhism and cultural nationalism.

I. THE CRITIQUE OF "EXPERIENCE"

In his writings, D. T. Suzuki emphasized that the experience of satori, or enlightenment, was absolutely essential to Zen. Suzuki wrote, "At all events there is no Zen without satori, which is indeed the Alpha and Omega of Zen Buddhism. Zen devoid of satori is like the sun without its light and heat. Zen may lose all its literature, all its monasteries, and all its paraphernalia; but as long as there is satori in it it will survive to eternity."⁷ This statement is just one example of many such statements asserting the unique character and essential role of satori. Satori, he said, is not a fact of information or an idea explainable in words or a concept understood by the intellect. Satori cannot be conveyed by one person to another person through language; "Zen defies explanation";⁸ "Satori can thus be had only through our personally experiencing it."⁹

Where Did Suzuki's "Satori" Come From?

This picture of Zen, centered around the satori awakening experience, is the conventional way we think of Zen today. Sharf, however, argues that Suzuki's claims about the importance and nature of satori are not part of traditional Zen/Chan but in fact are part of a modernist reconstruction of Zen which has been projected back in time so that we now unthinkingly assume it to be history. He has rightly pointed out that Suzuki's exposition of Zen arose as part of a larger movement by Japanese Buddhists to create a "new Buddhism" in the face of the advance of the West into Asia. The historical background is well known but it is important to recall the political context in which this happened. We need to remind ourselves of how directly the search for a new Buddhism was triggered by the fear of being colonized by the Western powers and the desire to be respected by the Western nations.

⁶ See the reply to Brian Victoria in Satō 2010.

⁷ Suzuki (1927) 1970, pp. 229–30.

⁸ Suzuki (1927) 1970, p. 243.

⁹ Suzuki (1927) 1970, p. 230.

In 1853, Commodore Matthew Perry sailed his “black ships” into Uraga 浦賀 Bay, forcefully breaking the Japanese policy of national isolation. Thereafter, the Tokugawa government was coerced into signing unequal treaties with the Western powers. In the technical language of international diplomacy at the time, Japan was formally categorized as a “barbarian” state; it was not considered “civilized” as European states were. When the Tokugawa shogunate fell in 1868 and the Meiji emperor assumed the throne, the new Japanese government sought to modernize the country by studying the Western nations and selectively adopting Western institutions and practices. The Meiji government, alive to Western notions of rationality and science, considered Buddhism corrupted by superstition and thus subjected it to a persecution (*haibutsu kishaku* 廃仏毀釈, or “abolish Buddhism, destroy Śākyamuni”), which forced ordained monks and nuns back into secular life, confiscated temple property, and destroyed temple buildings and artifacts.¹⁰ Although there were local players who had their own reasons for shutting down Buddhist temples, the persecution was motivated by the desire to get the classification of Japan in international diplomatic terms upgraded from “barbarian” state to “civilized” state. At the same time, the new Meiji government also promoted Shinto as a national ideology. Japanese Shinto nationalists ignored the long history of Buddhist adaptation to Japanese culture and criticized it as a foreign religion imported from the foreign countries of China, Korea, and India.¹¹ In this crisis for survival, defenders of Japanese Buddhism needed a new formulation of Buddhism, a *Shin Bukkyō* 新仏教 or “New Buddhism,” which on the one hand would satisfy Western conceptions of modernity and scientific rationality while on the other hand stake a claim to the new Japanese national identity then under construction.¹²

As a young man, Suzuki had spent the years from 1897 to 1909 in Illinois working as an assistant to Paul Carus, a scholar and publisher who, in order to bridge the gap between science and religion, was advancing the “Religion of Science.” In Carus’s vision, when religion is purified of its superstitious and irrational elements, and when science is purified of its atheism and materialism, then religion and science will point at the “unity of the realm of spirit and the realm of scientific truth.”¹³ Sharf says

¹⁰ Ketelaar 1993.

¹¹ Ketelaar 1993, pp. 48, 55, 241.

¹² Sharf 1993, pp. 3–6.

¹³ Sharf 1993, p. 17.

that D. T. Suzuki's answer to the need for a new Buddhism in Japan was to borrow Paul Carus's vision of the religion of science and to promote it under the label of Zen. In addition, during his eleven-year stay in America, Suzuki was exposed to the then current trends in Western thought, and on his return to Japan, he brought back William James's idea of pure experience and conveyed this to his friend, the philosopher Nishida Kitarō.¹⁴ Nishida then employed the concept of pure experience (*junsui keiken* 純粹経験) as the foundation for his first book, *Zen no kenkyū* 善の研究 (A Study of the Good).¹⁵ In that book, Nishida says, "By *pure* I am referring to that state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination."¹⁶ Pure experience is pure in the sense that it contains no intellectual discrimination, no dualistic conceptualization. Sharf says that, in philosophical terms, this is what Suzuki meant by *satori*.¹⁷ Thus, he concludes that D. T. Suzuki's exposition of Zen and *satori*, "with its unrelenting emphasis on an unmediated inner experience, is not derived from Buddhist sources so much as from his broad familiarity with European and American philosophical and religious writings."¹⁸ On this account, Suzuki's concept of *satori* is not originally derived from traditional Buddhism. It has an American origin.

Did Monks Meditate for Enlightenment?

Contrary to the picture painted for us by D. T. Suzuki, Sharf denies that traditional Chan/Zen practice was directed toward the attainment of an enlightenment experience: "In point of fact, traditional Ch'an and Zen practice was oriented not towards engendering 'enlightenment' experiences, but rather to perfecting the ritual performance of Buddhahood. . . . The modern notion that Ch'an and Zen monks were required to experience *satori* before they could 'inherit the dharma' is simply inaccurate."¹⁹ Similarly he says that our image of Buddhist monks leading lives centered on meditation practice is also mistaken. "In fact, contrary to the image propagated by twentieth-century apologists, the actual practice of what we would call meditation rarely played a major role in Buddhist monastic life."²⁰

¹⁴ Sharf 1993, p. 22.

¹⁵ Nishida 1911. For an English translation, see Nishida 1990.

¹⁶ Nishida 1990, p. 3.

¹⁷ Sharf 1993, pp. 21–23.

¹⁸ Sharf 1998, p. 101.

¹⁹ Sharf 1995a, p. 243.

²⁰ Sharf 1995a, p. 241; see also Sharf 1998, p. 99.

What is the evidence for these assertions? In support of these claims, Sharf marshals several arguments. First, he claims that the key Japanese terms for experience, *keiken* 經驗 and *taiken* 體驗, are rarely found in pre-modern Japanese texts and that they only start to be used in the early Meiji period.²¹ A second argument concerns *mārga* texts, texts outlining the path of practice. Here Sharf's critique of Zen broadens to include Buddhism in general. *Mārga* texts are often taken to be guidebooks through the stages of consciousness that a practitioner encounters when advancing into deeper and deeper meditation. But Sharf argues that they are not based on the personal experiences which a master practitioner has had during meditation. *Mārga* texts are "first and foremost scholastic compendiums, compiled by monks of formidable learning who were attempting to systematize and schematize the confused and often conflicting descriptions of practices and stages found scattered throughout the canon."²² When unusual states of consciousness do get mentioned in these texts, they turn out to be the kind which modern people cannot accept: "They are filled with detailed accounts of the supernatural attainments (*siddhi*) that accompany particular meditative trances, including such powers as walking through walls, flying through the air, becoming invisible, reading minds, recalling past lives, and so on."²³

A third argument introduces a theory of language that similarly applies not just to Chan/Zen but to all of Buddhism. Sharf says the vocabulary of meditation and experience in Buddhism—*śamatha*, *vipassanā*, *śotāpatti*, *satori*, etc.—does not actually refer to or denote states of consciousness. If it did, then one could expect that meditation teachers would agree on what these terms labelled. But "the lack of consensus among prominent Buddhist teachers as to the designation not only of particular states of consciousness, but also of the psychotropic techniques used to produce them (e.g., *śamatha* versus *vipassanā*) belies the notion that the rhetoric of Buddhist meditative experience functions ostensibly."²⁴ That is, words for states of consciousness in Buddhism do not get their sense by referring to "experiences." Such vocabulary does not "function ostensibly."²⁵ When people use such language, what are they doing? Sharf seems to be saying we need to shift our attention away from the content of the language toward its function or its

²¹ Sharf 1993, pp. 21–22; 1998, p. 102.

²² Sharf 1995a, p. 238.

²³ Sharf 1995a, p. 238.

²⁴ Sharf 1995a, p. 265.

²⁵ Sharf 1995a, p. 228; see also Sharf 1998, p. 103.

performance. He finds “such discourse turns out to function ideologically and performatively—wielded more often than not in the interests of legitimation and institutional authority.”²⁶ Sharf’s comments about language, contrasting ostensive meaning with ideological performance, recalls Wittgenstein’s private language argument.²⁷ Unfortunately there is not enough space here to give this topic the attention it deserves.

Suzuki’s account of Zen practice as founded on the experience of *satori* is, says Sharf, an “invented tradition,” inspired by William James’s concept of pure experience. But the evidence he has adduced so far—that the terms *keiken* and *taiken* do not appear in classical texts, *mārga* texts are not accounts of personal experience, the Buddhist vocabulary for personal experience is not used “ostensively”—is indirect circumstantial evidence, so to speak. Is there no more direct evidence for judging whether the Chan/Zen tradition is founded on the notion of *satori*? Is the *satori* experience part of an invented tradition, or is it part of the historical tradition itself? Instead of providing more direct evidence, Sharf moves to putting forth an alternate theory.

Enlightenment: Experience or Ritual?

Where Suzuki talks of Zen enlightenment as a sudden experience, Sharf offers an account of enlightenment as ritual performance. That is, when traditional Chan texts speak of enlightenment, these texts are not thinking of enlightenment as the attainment of a state of consciousness, or “phenomenological” experience.

One searches in vain for a premodern Chinese or Japanese equivalent to the phenomenological notion of “experience.” Nor is it legitimate to interpret such technical Zen terms as *satori* (to understand) or *kenshō* (to see one’s original nature) as denoting some species of unmediated experience in the sense of Nishida’s *junsui keiken*. In traditional Chinese Buddhist literature such terms are used to denote the full comprehension and appreciation of central Buddhist tenets such as *śūnyatā*, Buddha-nature, or dependent origination. There are simply no *a priori* grounds to conceive of such moments of insight in phenomenological terms. Indeed, Chinese Buddhist commentators in general, and Ch’an

²⁶ Sharf 1995a, p. 228; see also Sharf 1998 pp. 96, 103.

²⁷ The “private language” argument centers on §§244–71 of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*.

exegetes in particular, tend to be antipathetic to any form of phenomenological reduction.²⁸

That is to say, when traditional Chan texts say of someone that he is enlightened, it does not mean that he had a sudden flash of insight, or was consumed by the experience of nirvana, or for a moment experienced the emptiness of all phenomenal existence. This way of thinking about enlightenment is “phenomenological reduction” and it is a mistake. Rather, to say of a person that he is enlightened is to say that he has mastered the ritual of acting like a Buddha.

In a Chinese Ch’an monastery, the abbot was treated as if he were the Buddha himself. The abbot’s primary religious duty consists in ritually enacting the role of Buddha. Indeed, according to Ch’an tradition the central Buddha icon in the Buddha Hall—the focal point of Chinese Buddhist monastic ritual—came to be replaced in Ch’an monasteries by the living person of the abbot, thereby obviating the need for a Buddha Hall altogether.²⁹

In addition to the abbot himself, the monks under him were ritually trained to act as if they were in the presence of the Buddha himself.³⁰ The duties of the abbot were many and were prescribed in great detail. Chief among them was “ascending the hall” (Ch. *shangtang* 上堂; Jp. *jōdō*) and giving a lecture. The entire event was highly choreographed. The lecture itself was given in the Chan style of language with its numerous rhetorical conventions and although completely scripted, it was taken as the spontaneous utterance of a Buddha.³¹ A monk candidate for abbot had to train for many years studying Buddhist texts, mastering the rhetorical style of Chan discourse, rehearsing the performance of the many rituals, and so on. It is for this reason that enlightenment cannot be thought of as a single event, a religious experience.

Years of rigorous training and rehearsal were necessary to master the repertoire before one could do a flawless rendering of enlightened discourse. . . . Thus, the goal of Chan monastic practice cannot be reduced to some private “inner transformation” or “mystical

²⁸ Sharf 1993, p. 22.

²⁹ Sharf 1992, p. 6.

³⁰ Sharf 2005, p. 263.

³¹ Sharf 2005, pp. 265–66; 1992, pp. 6–7.

experience.” It lies rather in the practical mastery of buddhahood—the ability to execute, day in and day out, a compelling rendition of liberated action and speech, and to pass that mastery on to one’s disciples.³²

In other words, in Sharf’s explanation, to say that a person is enlightened is to say that he has mastered the ritual of “being enlightened.”

Enlightenment is not so much a “state of mind” as a form of knowledge and mode of activity, acquired through a long and arduous course of physical discipline and study. Advancement within the ecclesiastical hierarchy is not associated with fleeting moments of insight or transformative personal experiences so much as with vocational maturity—one’s ability to publicly instantiate or model liberation. In short, while notions such as *satori* and *kenshō* may play an important role in the mythology and ideology of Zen, their role in the day-to-day training of Zen monks is not as central as some contemporary writings might lead one to believe.³³

These are the two halves of Sharf’s position, the first half critiquing the current concept of *satori* or enlightenment as a religious experience, and the second half advancing the claim that enlightenment is the mastery of ritual behavior. It is time now to evaluate these claims.

Enlightenment in Premodern Texts

First, is enlightenment a “phenomenological” experience? What distinction is there between enlightenment conceived phenomenologically and enlightenment conceived as ritual mastery? One feature of enlightenment conceived as a phenomenological experience is that it is an event, an occurrence. An event happens on a certain day and at a certain time; it has a beginning, lasts for a certain amount of time, and then ends. In contrast, enlightenment conceived as vocational maturity, the full comprehension of central Buddhist tenets and mastery of Buddhist ritual, is not an event. It does not happen all at once on a certain day at a certain hour. If one could measure the amount of time a person spends attaining ritual maturity, it would be measured in years and there would probably be no precisely

³² Sharf 2005, p. 266.

³³ Sharf 1995b, p. 418.

defined starting point or end point. Typically, reaching full maturity in any discipline happens so gradually that one speaks of it not so much as an *event* but as a *process*. This is one signal difference between enlightenment conceived as a phenomenological experience (event) and enlightenment conceived of as ritual maturity (process). Of course, there are other differences between these two conceptions of enlightenment but this distinction between *event* and *process* is all we need for the moment.³⁴

Our question can now be reframed: In traditional Chinese Buddhist literature, is enlightenment depicted as an event (phenomenological experience) or as a process (ritual maturity)? What is the “traditional” way in which enlightenment is depicted—event or process? The answer to this question will help us answer the larger question: Is D. T. Suzuki’s way of depicting enlightenment an “invention of tradition”?

With the compilation of the Chinese Buddhist Electronic Text Association (CBETA) database which contains the entire *Taishō daizōkyō* (T) and the *Zoku zōkyō* (ZZ) canons, it is now possible to conduct searches for the terms used to refer to Zen enlightenment in classical texts. For these terms, I conducted two kinds of searches on the CBETA database, one “open search” covering the entire *Taishō daizōkyō* and *Zoku zōkyō* canons, and one “restricted search” where the search field was limited to Chan materials (Ch. *Chan zong bulei* 禪宗部類).³⁵ First, we can comment on the point raised by Sharf about the Japanese terms for “experience,” *keiken* and *taiken*. Our searches showed that although these terms do occur, they occur infrequently and hardly at all in Chan/Zen texts (see table 1).

Table 1. Instances of *keiken* and *taiken*.

TRANSLATION	CHINESE		NO. HITS	NO. HITS
	CHARACTERS	PRONUNCIATIONS	OPEN SEARCH	RESTRICTED SEARCH
“experience”	經驗	Ch. <i>jīng yān</i> ; Jp. <i>keiken</i>	61	15
“experience”	體驗	Ch. <i>tī yān</i> ; Jp. <i>taiken</i>	21	9

³⁴ The distinction between “event” and “process” is not a hard ontological distinction. It is a “common sense” distinction reflected in language. That is all that is required for the present argument.

³⁵ See CBETA 中華電子佛典協會 (Chinese Buddhist Electronic Tripiṭaka Collection). <http://www.cbeta.org/>.

So Sharf is quite right in his claim that these terms for “experience” do not occur frequently in traditional Chan literature.

But what does this fact prove? It does not prove that there is no phenomenological conception of “experience” in classical Chan texts. It is not to be expected that modern philosophical terminology should occur in premodern classical literature; it is not to be expected that Chan texts from, for example, the Tang and Song periods (seventh to thirteenth centuries) should use the modern twentieth- and twenty-first century philosophical terminology for “experience.” Chan texts from the Tang and Song periods had their own vocabulary for talking about awakening or enlightenment. The common character for Zen awakening or enlightenment in early Chan texts is *wu* 悟. This is pronounced in Japanese either as “satori” as a standalone word, or as *go* in compounds. The character occurs in a great variety of expressions, and searches on the CBETA database show that these expressions occur many times in early Chan texts. Table 2 shows the number of hits for several expressions containing this character.

In these expressions, *wu* is treated “phenomenologically,” that is, as an event and not as a ritual process. In the term “sudden awakening,” for example, the adjective “sudden” 頓 (Ch. *dun* 頓; Jp. *ton*) clearly indicates an event and not a process extended over a period of time. In the other expressions, the adjective and adverb modifiers make it clear that the phrase describes an event and not a process. *Wu* happens “suddenly”; it is triggered “at this” or “at these words.” It happens “at once.” In these contexts, it is implausible to think that *wu* refers to mastery of ritual performance. One cannot naturally say “suddenly he had great ritual maturity.”

There are other expressions which do not use the character *wu* but which in context imply that the person had an awakening experience, for example the word for “insight” or “realization,” *xing* 省 (Jp. *shō* or *sei*; see table 3).

One might argue that “had insight” 有省 is a word with a broad meaning and does not necessarily refer to an event, the moment of Zen enlightenment, in every case. Indeed, there are probably instances where “had insight” could be given a ritualist interpretation, but there are many instances where “had insight” must be given an event interpretation. For example, this phrase is used in one of the classic accounts of Zen awakening. In this story, Deshan 德山 (Jp. Tokusan; 782–865), the scholar of the *Diamond Sutra*, has just been humiliated by an old woman selling tea snacks; she had asked him a question he could not answer. Following her instructions, he sought out Longtan 龍潭 (Jp. Ryūtan; n.d.). He spoke with Longtan for a long time and when he went to leave, it was already dark.

Table 2. Phrases with the term *wu*.

TRANSLATION	CHINESE		NO. HITS	NO. HITS
	CHARACTERS	PRONUNCIATIONS	OPEN SEARCH	RESTRICTED SEARCH
“sudden awakening”	頓悟	Ch. <i>dunwu</i> ; Jp. <i>tongo</i>	3,114	930
“at once he was awakened”	忽悟	Ch. <i>hu wu</i> ; Jp. <i>tachimachi go su</i>	280	128
“at once he was awakened”	忽然悟	Ch. <i>huran wu</i> ; Jp. <i>kotsunen ni go su</i>	49	40
“he was vastly awakened”	豁然悟	Ch. <i>huoran wu</i> ; Jp. <i>katsuzen ni go su</i>	95	28
“at this he was awakened”	於此悟	Ch. <i>yuci wu</i> ; Jp. <i>kore ni oite go su</i>	102	47
“at these words, he was awakened”	於言下悟	Ch. <i>yuyanxia wu</i> ; Jp. <i>gonka ni oite go su</i>	37	22
“at once he was greatly awakened”	忽大悟	Ch. <i>hu dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>tachimachi daigo su</i>	270	57
“at once he had an awakening”	當下悟	Ch. <i>dangxia wu</i> ; Jp. <i>tōka go su</i>	19	19
“at once he was greatly awakened”	忽然大悟	Ch. <i>huran dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>kotsunen ni daigo su</i>	251	243
“he had a great vast awakening”	豁然大悟	Ch. <i>huoran dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>katsuzen ni daigo su</i>	584	288
“at once he had certain awakening”	忽然領悟	Ch. <i>huran lingwu</i> ; Jp. <i>kotsunen ni ryōgo su</i>	7	5
“at this he was greatly awakened”	於此大悟	Ch. <i>yuci dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>kore ni oite daigo su</i>	71	51
“at these words, he was greatly awakened”	於言下大悟	Ch. <i>yuyanxia dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>gonka ni oite daigo su</i>	497	294
“at these words, he had a sudden awakening”	於言下頓悟	Ch. <i>yu yanyxia dunwu</i> ; Jp. <i>gonka ni oite tongo su</i>	71	25
“at once he had a great awakening”	當下大悟	Ch. <i>dangxia dawu</i> ; Jp. <i>tōka daigo su</i>	73	47
TOTAL HITS			5,520	2,224

Table 3. Phrases with the term *xing*.

TRANSLATION	CHINESE		NO. HITS OPEN	NO. HITS RESTRICTED
	CHARACTERS	PRONUNCIATIONS	SEARCH	SEARCH
"he had an insight"	有省	Ch. <i>you xing</i> ; Jp. <i>shō[sei] ari</i>	3,380	1,446
"suddenly he had an insight"	忽有省	Ch. <i>hu you xing</i> ; Jp. <i>tachimachi shō [sei] ari</i>	282	20
"suddenly he had an insight"	忽然有省	Ch. <i>huran you xing</i> ; Jp. <i>kotsunen ni shō [sei] ari</i>	117	63
"then he had an insight"	便省	Ch. <i>bian xing</i> Jp. <i>sunawachi satoru</i>	28	22
TOTAL HITS			3,807	1,651

Longtan lit a paper lantern and gave it to Deshan. When Deshan took it and turned to go outside, Longtan blew out the lantern. Deshan *suddenly had an insight* (Ch. *huran you xing* 忽然有省; Jp. *kotsunen ni shō [sei] ari*).³⁶ A search for *you xing* 有省, "he had an insight," restricted to Chan materials yields 1,446 hits. In some of these hits, it is possible the phrase is used to mean the monk "had ritual maturity" and could enact the role of Buddha. It would be necessary to examine each instance of use to decide this. But as the story of Deshan and Longtan makes clear, "he had an insight" (*you xing*) was certainly used "phenomenologically" to mean awakening as a sudden event.

There are several more expressions which do not literally mean "he was enlightened," but which can certainly have that meaning in a particular context (see table 4).

These miscellaneous expressions are all similar in that they do not literally say "he experienced enlightenment." But they are often used in contexts which clearly imply the attainment of a sudden enlightenment. For example, the term, "attain the way" (a possible candidate for the ritualist interpretation of enlightenment) in case 22 of the *Blue Cliff Record* (Ch. *Biyan lu* 碧巖錄; Jp. *Hekiganroku*) refers to the moment of awakening.

³⁶ See case no. 28 of the *Wumen guan* 無門關 (Jp. *Mumon kan*; hereafter, *Gateless Gate*), and case no. 4 of the *Foguo yuanwu chanshi biyan lu* 佛果圓悟禪師碧巖錄 (Jp. *Bukka engo zenji hekiganroku*; *Blue Cliff Record of Chan Master Foguo Yuanwu*, hereafter *Blue Cliff Record*). See, respectively, T no. 2005, 48: 296b20–c16, and T no. 2003, 48: 143b4–144c24.

Table 4. Other phrases.

TRANSLATION	CHINESE CHARACTERS	PRONUNCIATIONS	NO. HITS	NO. HITS
			OPEN SEARCH	RESTRICTED SEARCH
“attain the Way”	成道	Ch. <i>chengdao</i> ; Jp. <i>jōdō</i>	7,709	1,279
“straightway he broke through”	驀然打破	Ch. <i>maran dapo</i> ; Jp. <i>bakuzen ni taha su</i>	29	25
“break through the bottom of the bucket”	桶底脫	Ch. <i>tongdituo</i> ; Jp. <i>tōteidatsu</i>	106	95
“suddenly he understood”	豁然領解	Ch. <i>huoran lingjie</i> ; Jp. <i>katsuzen ni ryōkai</i>	11	1
“he illuminated the great matter right under his feet”	明脚跟下大事	Ch. <i>ming jiaogengxia dashi</i> ; Jp. <i>kyakkonka no daiji o akasu</i>	1	1
“at these words he attained great freedom”	於言下得大自在	Ch. <i>yuyanxia de dazizai</i> ; Jp. <i>gonka ni oite daijizai o etari</i>	1	1
“got it”	體得	Ch. <i>tide</i> ; Jp. <i>taitoku</i>	576	160
TOTAL HITS			8,433	1,562

There, the Chinese sentence “今日始是鰲山成道 *jinri shi shi an shan cheng dao*”³⁷ is literally translated, “Today on Tortoise Mountain, I’ve finally attained the Way,” but note that Cleary translates it, “Today on Tortoise Mountain I’ve finally achieved enlightenment,” as if it were an event.³⁸ For the expression “straightway he broke through,” (Ch. *maran dapo* 驀然打破; Jp. *bakuzen ni taha su*), see the letter that Gaofeng Yuanmiao 高峰原妙 (Jp. Kōhō Genmyō; 1238–1295) wrote to his master, which clearly describes a sudden event in consciousness and not the gradual ripening of ritual maturity.

In the middle of the second month, I returned to the [monk’s] hall. In the following month on the night of the sixteenth, I was

³⁷ T no. 2003, 48: 145a19.

³⁸ Cleary 1998, p. 127.

deep in sleep when suddenly I recalled the question Master Duanqiao raised in his room, “The ten thousand things return to one. What does one return to?” From this, a feeling of doubt suddenly arose and consumed me. Immediately I became unable to distinguish east from west. I completely forgot about eating and sleeping. Six days I passed like this until one morning, as I was walking down a corridor, just then the assembled monks came out of the monk’s hall; without thinking, I joined them. On arriving at the Pavilion of the Three Stupas, we chanted sutras. Suddenly I saw the mounted verse dedicated to Master Wuzu Fayan, the last two lines of which read, “In a hundred years, there are 36,000 mornings; fundamentally all that leaves and returns is this fellow here.” Previously I had been asked by the Master, “Who drags this corpse around?” *Straightway I broke through*. At once my spirit flew off leaving my flesh to mourn, and completely exhausted I was reborn. It was just as if I had put down a one-hundred-twenty-pound carrying pole.³⁹

The expression “suddenly he understood” (Ch. *huoran lingjie* 豁然領解; Jp. *katsuzen ni ryōkai su*) again need not always refer to a “phenomenological” Zen enlightenment experience but in case 19 of the *Blue Cliff Record*, it definitely does.⁴⁰ Whenever Master Juzhi 俱胝 (Jp. Gutei; n.d.) was asked anything, he would always just raise one finger. When his servant boy was asked what his master taught, the boy just raised one finger. On learning of this, Master Juzhi cut off the servant boy’s finger with a knife. As the boy ran away screaming, Master Juzhi called to him. When the boy looked back, Master Juzhi raised his finger and the boy *suddenly understood* (*huoran lingjie*). Here “understood” clearly is meant to imply that the boy had an understanding as a sudden event; it certainly does not mean that he attained ritual maturity and could thus enact the role of an abbot in a monastery.

Finally, the term *taitoku* 體得 (Ch. *tide*) has been included in this list because, according to the late centenarian Zen teacher, Sasaki Jōshū Rōshi,

³⁹ 二月半歸堂。忽於次月十六夜夢中。忽憶斷橋和尚室中所舉萬法歸一一歸何處話。自此疑情頓發。打成一片。直得東西不辨。寢食俱忘。至第六日辰巳間。在廊下行。見眾僧堂內出。不覺輓於隊中。至三塔閣上誦經。擡頭忽覩五祖演和尚真贊。末後兩句云。百年三萬六千朝。返覆元來是遮漢。日前被老和尚所問拖死屍句子。驀然打破。直得魂飛膽喪。絕後再甦。何啻如放下百二十斤擔子。 *Gaofeng Yuanmiao chanshi yulu* 高峰原妙禪師語錄 (Jp. *Kōhō Genmyō zenji goroku*; Recorded Sayings of Chan Master Gaofeng Yuanmiao) (italics added); ZZ no. 1400, 70: 690b8–15.

⁴⁰ For this case, see T no. 2003, 48: 154c2–155a20.

the common word for Zen experience in Japanese Rinzai monasteries prior to the war was not *taiken* or *keiken*, but *taitoku*.⁴¹ *Taitoku* is a compound of *tai* “body” and *toku* “acquire, master, make one’s own.” As the CBETA search indicates, there are numerous occurrences of this term, thus showing that modern Zen practice discourse shares some vocabulary with classical Chan/Zen texts. *Taiken* and *keiken* may not be part of the Chan/Zen traditional vocabulary, but *taitoku* is.

One term which lends itself to a process interpretation is the term *kenshō* 見性 (Ch. *jianxing*), “see one’s nature.” This term occurs very frequently, as the numbers in table 5 indicate.

Table 5. Instances of the term *kenshō*.

TRANSLATION	CHINESE		NO. HITS	NO. HITS
	CHARACTERS	PRONUNCIATIONS	OPEN SEARCH	RESTRICTED SEARCH
“see one’s nature”	見性	Ch. <i>jianxing</i> ; Jp. <i>kenshō</i>	7,553	1,993

Many occurrences of this term occur inside the set phrase “point directly at the human mind, see one’s nature, and become Buddha” (Ch. *zhizhi renxin jianxing chengfo* 直指人心見性成佛; Jp. *jikishi ninshin kenshō jōbutsu*). It may be used in such a general way that it is open to a process interpretation. More detailed analysis of individual cases would be required to determine if this is so.

To call a practice an “invented tradition” is to imply that it was recently created but that people falsely claim it to be ancient. This CBETA survey shows that D. T. Suzuki’s conception of *satori* as a sudden experience has not been recently invented or manufactured. Although the modern philosophical terminology of *taiken* and *keiken* is not used in traditional Chan literature, the character *wu*, read *go* or *satori* in Japanese, is used to refer to awakening as a sudden event. There are literally hundreds, perhaps thousands, of instances where someone is described as suddenly experiencing enlightenment. This is the “traditional” way of conceiving of enlightenment in Chan/Zen. D. T. Suzuki did not invent that tradition.

⁴¹ In lectures during the December *rōhatsu sesshin* 臘八接心, 1997, at Mount Baldy, California.

Ineffable and Inconceivable

Let us now take up the thorny issue of satori as pure experience. Nishida explained it as “that state of experience just as it is without the least addition of deliberative discrimination.”⁴² I do not want to debate whether Zen awakening is non-conceptual or whether the idea of a non-conceptual experience is an intelligible idea.⁴³ In this section, even though I think the very idea of a non-conceptual experience is highly problematic, I do want to argue that many Buddhist texts did indeed think of the experience of awakening as ineffable and inconceivable, that to depict awakening as ineffable and inconceivable is not “invented tradition,” but the historical “tradition” itself.

In Sharf’s explanation, satori is characterized as ineffable and inconceivable in order for it to play its strategic and ideological role. In stressing the strategic and ideological function of religious experience here, Sharf is following Wayne Proudfoot whose research into religious experience is less concerned with the content of religious experience and more concerned with the fact that the concept can be deployed ideologically to confer authority and legitimacy on those who have it and to refuse it to others.⁴⁴ When Suzuki stressed the essential role of satori in Zen, he was joining the company of Western scholars like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Rudolf Otto who had argued that experience—not metaphysical doctrine, not ecclesiastical institution—was the core of religion.⁴⁵ The concept of religious experience provided men like Schleiermacher and Otto with a “protective strategy,”⁴⁶ an “exegetical strategy,”⁴⁷ to defend religion from secular criticism. They could argue that only a person who had had religious experience had the authority to speak about religion; those who had no religious experience ipso facto had no knowledge of what religion was and therefore lacked the necessary credentials to criticize it.⁴⁸ In this ideological analysis, the concept of religious experience *prima facie* looks as if it is distinguishing a state of consciousness; in fact, it uses the language of consciousness politically to distinguish groups of people, empowering some and disempowering others.

⁴² Nishida 1987, p. 3. Nishida footnotes William James, but he also footnotes several other scholars on “immediate experience,” notably Wilhelm Wundt, Stout, and Schopenhauer (Nishida 1990, pp. 3–10).

⁴³ See my discussion in Hori 2000.

⁴⁴ Proudfoot 1985; Sharf 1995a, pp. 229–31.

⁴⁵ Sharf 1993, p. 21.

⁴⁶ Proudfoot 1985, pp. 199–209.

⁴⁷ Sharf 1995a, p. 229.

⁴⁸ Sharf 1995a, p. 229.

Applied to Zen, this argument meant that “only those privy to a legitimate *kenshō* experience are qualified to speak of Zen.”⁴⁹ Just as Rudolph Otto used to say that the reader who lacked the personal experience of numinous religion “is requested to read no further,”⁵⁰ so also Suzuki’s account of Zen awakening implied that only one who had experienced *satori* had the right to speak about it.

A reader of Sharf’s argument gets the impression that D. T. Suzuki turned William James’s idea of pure consciousness into Zen *satori* in order to manipulate the feature of ineffability for political purposes. However, Suzuki was following a long-established tradition that described the Buddha’s awakening as ineffable, indescribable, and thus impossible to convey to another person in language. The *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* (*Majjhima Nikaya* 26) depicts the Buddha himself reflecting after his awakening experience, “This Dhamma that I have attained is deep, hard to see, hard to realize, peaceful, refined, beyond the scope of conjecture, subtle, to-be-experienced by the wise. . . . And if I were to teach the Dhamma and others would not understand me, that would be tiresome for me, troublesome for me.”⁵¹ The “Skillful Means” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra* similarly shows the Buddha wondering how to teach to sentient beings the enlightenment he has attained. He says:

It is impossible to explain this Dharma;
The powers of speech fail.
No other sentient being is able to understand it,
Except for those bodhisattvas
Who, in their belief, are willing to understand.
Even the multitude of the Buddha’s disciples,
Who have formerly paid homage to all the Buddhas,
Who have put an end to all their corruption
And are bearing their last bodies,
Are not able to understand it.
Even if this whole world
Were filled with those such as Śāriputra,
And they tried together to comprehend it,

⁴⁹ Sharf 1993, pp. 25–26.

⁵⁰ Otto 1923, p. 8.

⁵¹ “Ariyapariyesana Sutta: The Noble Search.” Translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. 2004. Access to Insight: Readings in Theravāda Buddhism. Barre Center for Buddhist Studies. <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/mn/mn.026.than.html>.

They still would not be able to understand completely
The wisdom of the Buddhas.⁵²

The *Avataṃsaka Sutra* begins with the Buddha surrounded by numerous enlightened beings who in verse describe the Buddha, the Buddha's body, the Buddha's compassion, the Buddha's teachings, the Buddha's light, the Buddha's enlightenment as boundless, sublime, supreme, inexhaustible, infinite, and inconceivable. The celestial king Ocean of Subtle Flames says, "The Buddha is inconceivable, beyond discrimination, / Comprehending forms everywhere as insubstantial."⁵³ The celestial king Banner of the Delightful Light of Truth says, "The realm of the buddhas is inconceivable: no sentient being can fathom it."⁵⁴ The herb spirit Auspicious says, "The Buddha's knowledge is inconceivable— / He knows the minds of all sentient beings, / And by the power of various techniques, / Destroys their delusions and infinite pains."⁵⁵ Sanctuary spirit Banner of Pure Adornments says, "Everything at the site of enlightenment produces exquisite sound / Extolling the pure, inconceivable powers of the Buddha / As well as the perfected causal practices: this can be heard by Ineffable Light."⁵⁶ In numerous places in the Buddhist tradition, the Buddha's enlightenment is described as inconceivable and ineffable.

Sharf claims that D. T. Suzuki's exposition of Zen and satori, "with its unrelenting emphasis on an unmediated inner experience, is not derived from Buddhist sources so much as from his broad familiarity with European and American philosophical and religious writings."⁵⁷ This claim is implausible. The idea of religious experience has been around for a long time. Suzuki may have learned about James's notion of "pure experience," but the idea that the Buddha's enlightenment is ineffable and inconceivable is the standard position of Buddhism throughout its history. Buddhist texts talked of the Buddha's experience as ineffable long before James coined the term "pure experience." Rather than claim that Suzuki's concept of satori was modelled on James's notion of pure experience, it is more plausible to claim that James modeled his concept of pure experience on older conceptions of the ineffability of religious experience.

⁵² Kubo and Yuyama 1993, pp. 28–29.

⁵³ Cleary 1993, p. 65.

⁵⁴ Cleary 1993, p. 66.

⁵⁵ Cleary 1993, p. 115.

⁵⁶ Cleary 1993, p. 125.

⁵⁷ Sharf 1998, p. 101.

Inventing Tradition and the Koan

The concept of satori was fundamental to Suzuki's exposition of Zen, but equally important to his exposition was the Zen koan. In fact, Suzuki introduced the Zen koan to the Western world. His account of satori is tightly intertwined with his account of the koan practice. The koan is a device to lead a Zen practitioner to the experience of satori. "Without the koan the Zen consciousness loses its pointer, and there will never be a state of satori."⁵⁸ Satori and koan are not two independent topics in Suzuki's account. If Sharf maintains that the concept of satori is an invented tradition created by Suzuki, does that mean that his account of the koan practice tradition is also invented?

The koan originated, Suzuki mused, as a way of teaching Zen. The early Chan masters during the Tang period in China each had their own individual methods to evoke the awakening of Zen. To preserve their wisdom and to teach it to later generations, some of the *mondō* 問答 (Ch. *wenda*) dialogues of the old masters were selected for use as example cases.⁵⁹ When the *mondō* came to be used as a teaching device, it became a koan. Inevitably, the disciple who received one of these koan at first attempted to understand it intellectually, but "there is no room in the koan to insert an intellectual interpretation."⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the master advised the disciple to keep his mind constantly fixed on the koan, never wavering day or night. "The time will come when your mind will suddenly come to a stop like an old rat who finds himself in a cul-de-sac. Then there will be a plunging into the unknown with the cry, 'Ah, this!'"⁶¹ Struggling with the koan in this way, one fell into satori.

Whatever the origin, a koan-based teaching tradition did get created and transmitted down through the centuries. Because of this koan teaching tradition, a body of texts came into being—koan collections such as the twelfth-century *Blue Cliff Record*, the thirteenth-century *Gateless Gate*, and in Japan, the seventeenth-century *Shūmon kattōshū* 葛藤集 (*Entangling Vines*).⁶² There were others. In modern Rinzai monasteries in Japan today, and in Rinzai-influenced Zen centers in the West, Zen masters still teach the koan from these texts. Suzuki pointed out that though a thousand years had passed, Hakuin 白隠 (1686–1769) in Japan still taught the Zen of Huineng

⁵⁸ Suzuki (1933) 1970, p. 95.

⁵⁹ Suzuki (1933) 1970, p. 95.

⁶⁰ Suzuki (1933) 1970, p. 96.

⁶¹ Suzuki (1933) 1970, p. 102.

⁶² For the original, see Dōmae 2010. For an English translation, see Kirchner 2013.

慧能 (Jp. Enō; 638–713).⁶³ When Suzuki was still a student in university he commuted from Tokyo to the monastery of Engakuji in Kamakura in order to sit in zazen and wrestle with the koan.

In contemporary Rinzai Zen monastic koan training, is awakening treated phenomenologically or is it treated as ritual maturity? As Sharf says, “The most compelling arguments are not theoretical, but rather ethnographic.”⁶⁴ What is the ethnographic evidence? So far as I know, no anthropologist from the Western academy has conducted participant-observer research or done any kind of anthropological fieldwork on a Rinzai Zen monastery in Japan. But here I can report on actual practice in a Rinzai Zen monastery as I have spent thirteen years in Rinzai koan practice. I was an *unsui* 雲水—a Zen monk—between the years 1977 and 1990 at the Daitokuji Sōdō 大徳寺僧堂 in Kyoto, the Entsūji Sōdō 圓通寺僧堂 in Imari, and the Nagaoka Zenjuku 長岡禅塾 in Nagaoka, Japan. Here an “objective” academic theorist may complain that since I was a Zen koan practitioner, my testimony is subjectively biased and not to be trusted. I will have more to say about such a move to silence the practitioner. In the meanwhile, I will report on contemporary Rinzai koan practice as I have seen it.

Sharf writes, “The *kōan* genre, far from serving as a means to obviate reason, is a highly sophisticated form of scriptural exegesis: the manipulation or ‘solution’ of a particular *kōan* traditionally demanded an extensive knowledge of canonical Buddhist doctrine and classical Zen literature.”⁶⁵ In the monastery where I began koan practice, first-year monks were given their *shokan* 初關, “first barrier” koan—“Sound of One Hand,” or “Jōshū’s *Mu*”—and then instructed to focus their attention on it during meditation. The majority of these monks had little previous zazen experience before entering the monastery. And while some had majored in Buddhist studies in college, many had no significant intellectual background in Buddhist scripture (myself included). During their *sanzen* 参禅 meetings with the *rōshi* 老師, the monks received one basic instruction about how to meditate with koan: it is futile to try to intellectually understand the koan; instead, to see a koan (*koan o miru* 公案を見流), you must “become one” with the koan. “Become one with . . .” (*narikiru* 成り切る) is the core instruction with several variant expressions in language: “to become one piece with . . .” (*ichi mai to naru* 一枚となる); “to become the thing itself” (*sono mono to naru*

⁶³ Suzuki (1933) 1970, p. 107.

⁶⁴ Sharf 1995a, p. 260.

⁶⁵ Sharf 1993, p. 2.

そのものとなる); “to wrestle and fuse with . . .” (*torikunde gappei suru* 取り組んでいる合併する), and so on. The monk sees the koan not through intellectually understanding it but through the constant repeated effort to *narikiru*, to become one with it. He constantly repeats and poses to himself the question of the koan: “What is the sound of one hand?” until he finally fuses with the koan and becomes “the sound of one hand.” He constantly repeats “mu” to himself until he finally becomes a ball of *mu* (*mu no katamari* 無の塊) itself. This is the core experience a monk needs to see a koan. The monk does not need “an extensive knowledge of canonical Buddhist doctrine and classical Zen literature.”

Is the passing of the koan a “phenomenological experience”? Or is it the mastery of ritualized behaviour? This is not an either/or issue. The Zen monastery is a unique institution because it cultivates a nonrational insight through ritual formalism. I have discussed this elsewhere.⁶⁶ Many entering monks know through hearsay that the proper response to the “Mu” koan is to utter “mu” in a loud voice and the proper response to the koan “Sound of One Hand” is to thrust forward one hand and utter “*sekishu*” 隻手 (“sound of one hand”) in a loud voice. But the monk who treats his response as just a pro forma ritual is surprised to find that he does not pass. I remember a conversation with a first-year monk who told me that whenever he presented the ritual answer to “Mu,” the *rōshi* merely said “Hai” and rang the bell to dismiss him. As with all the other monks before him, this monk will be driven to try other answers—slapping the tatami, standing and shouting, laughing and crying, and so on—until after weeks and months, perhaps years, finally at his wit’s end, totally confused and desperate to see some light, he throws everything away and shouts with every ounce of strength “mu!” Although in ritual form he is still giving a great shout, for the first time he does it without self-consciousness, throwing himself completely into his action. It is at once a moment of rote repetition and a moment of totally concentrated consciousness. In ritual form, it is the same old action as before, but it is also the first time that he completely *narikiru*-s “mu!” One can say either the monk has left behind all ritual or that he has for the first time performed the ritual correctly. The *rōshi*, who has been waiting for this moment, now moves into action, for finally the monk has thrown away all his preconceptions and is open to instruction.

Zen monks follow a code of silence about koan practice and do not converse with their fellow monks about their *sanzen* meetings with the *rōshi*.

⁶⁶ Hori 1994.

However, during *ōzesshin* 大接心, a week of particularly intense practice, first- and second-year monks in my monastery were required to announce after *sanzen* whether they had passed their koan. Those who had passed were allowed to return to the *zendō* 禅堂 (meditation hall); those who had not passed were required to return to the *sanzen* lineup to face the *rōshi* again. From this, one can make some rough judgments about the monks' rate of progress. I would say that most monks pass their first koan somewhere between six months to a year after their admission to the monastery. This experience may be just a glimmer of insight that requires much further deepening, repetition, and exploration; or right from the start, it may be a much more thorough turnover of consciousness. Elsewhere I have tried to give a more analytic account of what happens in the moment of seeing a koan.⁶⁷ I will not repeat my account here but will assert that ethnographic observation of Rinzai monastic koan training would show there is an experience of seeing a koan and that it is a dramatic and sudden event. It is an experience in the phenomenological sense which Sharf denies.⁶⁸

To sum up, Suzuki's account of satori and his account of the koan are two halves of a single whole. If Suzuki's account of satori Zen experience is an invented tradition, as Sharf claims, then he should also claim that the Zen koan practice is an invented tradition. But long before Suzuki, there were koan in the Chan and Zen tradition; there were koan texts; there was and still is a koan monastic practice. And although for years, he was the main source of information in the West about the koan and koan practice, Suzuki himself did not invent the koan tradition.

II. AUTHENTIC BUDDHISM AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Although I cannot agree with the main thrust of Sharf's critique of Zen experience, I do think he is right to point out that the concept of satori has an ideological use and can be used strategically for political ends. However, I add a methodological caution: the fact that a statement has an ideological function does not mean it is otherwise meaningless. To always ignore the content of a statement and to insist that it has meaning only as ideology would be ideological reductionism. More loosely stated, statements in language have both denotation and connotation. To always ignore the denotation of a statement, its ostensive meaning, and insist it has ideologi-

⁶⁷ Hori 2000; Hori 2003.

⁶⁸ The Western Zen master Albert Low has described his own *kenshō* experience. See Low 2013, pp. 209–24.

cal connotation only would be ideological reductionism. Thus far, we have been assessing the content of Suzuki's account of satori and concluded that, in being depicted as an event in consciousness rather than as a ritual process, it is similar to the traditional concept of *wu* in classical Chan texts. Now it is time to assess the ideological or political impact of Suzuki's concept of satori. In this section, I will argue that indeed Suzuki did use the concept of satori as a protective strategy to claim for himself privileged access to authentic Buddhism, but in doing so he was "reflecting" a stance taken by the Orientalist scholars a generation before him.

"Reflecting" is a technical term here. It is similar to what Bernard Faure calls "secondary Orientalism."⁶⁹ Faure does not give a precise explanation of "secondary Orientalism" but I would explain it like this. In Orientalism tout court, the Western Orientalist imposes stereotypical images on Asia which privilege the West over Asia, such as, "The West is logical, Asia is intuitive. That is why the West is superior." This superiority justifies the imposition of Western authority over Asian culture. In secondary Orientalism, the Asian side takes the same stereotype but reverses the polarity so that the contrast privileges the Asian side over the West. "The West is logical, Asia is intuitive. That is why Asia is superior." When the Asian side performs this reversal of polarity, I call it "reflecting." In addition to "secondary Orientalism," sometimes this reversal of polarity is called "reverse Orientalism," "inverted Orientalism," or "Occidentalism."⁷⁰ D. T. Suzuki's stance with regard to the Orientalist scholars and to Japanese cultural nationalism are instances of such "reflecting."

The Orientalist Scholars

Although during the sixteenth century Jesuit missionaries in China and Japan had written extensively about their encounter with Buddhist priests and monasteries, for the general public in England, Europe, and America until the end of the 1700s, there was little available organized information about Buddhism. Then in the early 1800s, retired missionaries, administrators returning from the colonies, and lone travelers wrote accounts of their overseas experiences which were widely read in the popular press. The reading public learned that many of the heathen practices of Asia were derived originally from a single set of beliefs and practices—a religion—which they then

⁶⁹ Faure 1993, p. 5.

⁷⁰ Borup 2004.

started to call “Buddhism.”⁷¹ At first, Buddhism, with its account of endless karmic suffering, struck many as a religion of negativity and pessimism. But in mid-century there was a change of attitude. Although most Westerners were repelled by what they saw as the deep pessimism of the Buddhist teaching on suffering and karma, they agreed on the ethically noble character of the Buddha as a person.⁷² In fact, during the mid-Victorian period (1837–1901), there was a Buddhist boom in both England and America inspired by the figure of the noble Buddha. In England, Edwin Arnold (1832–1904) published a long poem lauding the Buddha, *The Light of Asia*, whose title drew a parallel with Jesus, the “light of the world.” First published in 1879, it went through more than a hundred printings and is still in print today.

Inevitably Westerners saw Buddhism through the lens of Western values. For example, the American theologian James Freeman Clark (1810–1888) explicitly compared Buddhism to Protestantism; he said, “Buddhism in Asia, like Protestantism in Europe, is a revolt of nature against spirit, of humanity against caste, of individual freedom against the despotism of an order, of salvation by faith against salvation by sacraments.”⁷³

But starting in mid-century, more and more of the public’s knowledge of Buddhism started to come from academically trained scholars, such as Eugène Burnouf (1801–1852), T. W. (Thomas William) Rhys Davids (1843–1922), Caroline Rhys Davids (1857–1942), and Max Müller (1823–1900). These were the first generation of Buddhist studies scholars. All were philologists who read and translated early Buddhist texts written in Pali, Sanskrit, and other classical languages. The work of these Orientalist scholars still stands as a great achievement. Burnouf wrote the first Western-language history of Buddhism. T. W. Rhys Davids and his wife Caroline founded the Pali Text Society in 1881 and in the years following published translations of the entire Pali Canon, along with concordances, dictionaries, histories, and commentaries. Max Müller edited the monumental fifty-volume *Sacred Books of the East* series. Müller is also credited with the founding of *Religionswissenschaft*—the “science of religion”—or, religious studies, as an academic discipline. Because there was less distance at that time between academic publication and periodical literature for the educated classes,⁷⁴ the Orientalist scholars played a major role in the public’s

⁷¹ Masuzawa 2005, p. 122.

⁷² Almond 1988, p. 77.

⁷³ Quoted in Almond 1988, p. 74.

⁷⁴ Almond 1988, p. 34.

understanding of Buddhism. These scholars had a particular conception of Buddhism and they were so influential in imposing their idea of what Buddhism ought to be that it has been said “they invented Buddhism as a world religion.”⁷⁵ Whether or not Buddhism was “invented,” the unintended result was, as Almond and others have noted, that in the late nineteenth century for people in the West, Buddhism came “to exist, not in the Orient, but in the Oriental libraries and institutes of the West, in its texts and manuscripts, at the desks of the Western savants who interpreted it. It had become a textual object, defined, classified, and interpreted through its own textuality.”⁷⁶

What was the conception of Buddhism held by the Orientalist Buddhist scholars? First of all, they distinguished sharply between Buddha the person, worthy of great respect, and Buddhism the religion, not worthy of equivalent respect. The Buddha was depicted not as a divine being but as a human being. He was “the Luther of Asia” standing up against the priests who controlled institutional religion and the caste system.⁷⁷ According to these scholars, the Buddha originally taught a system of rational philosophy and ethics, not a religion. He taught a system of ideas and a course of ethical conduct based on reason that required no supernatural being who created the universe and no wrathful God who punished the sinful. The scholars referred to this teaching as “original Buddhism” to distinguish it from later Buddhism, which in their view had degenerated into a mere religion. Scholars in the newly established science of religion studied how the later forms of Buddhism corrupted its original purity. They noted “the modifications it has undergone in various countries under the influence of ideas foreign, even antagonistic to itself; the way in which its fundamental doctrines have been overshadowed and destroyed by the persistent notions of Animism, by the growth of erroneous views as to the Buddha and the Buddhas, by the exaggerated importance attached to its mysticism, to its negative teaching.”⁷⁸ Under this later degenerate Buddhism, the Orientalist scholars included all of Mahayana Buddhism, tantric Buddhism, and all forms of Buddhism then practiced by contemporary Asians. The scholars saw in the institution and ritual form of Mahayana Buddhism too many resemblances to Roman Catholicism.⁷⁹ They were especially appalled by “Lamaism” which they

⁷⁵ Schober 2012, p. 14.

⁷⁶ Almond 1988, p. 13.

⁷⁷ Lopez 2008, p. 5.

⁷⁸ Rhys Davids 1891, p. 192.

⁷⁹ Rhys Davids 1891, pp. 192–94.

considered particularly degenerate, “the exact contrary of the earlier Buddhism.”⁸⁰

Several comments are in order. First, in Orientalist scholarship, the modern is authentic. The Orientalist academic scholars were evincing the scientific rationalism of modernity, and using it as the criterion to distinguish between authentic religion and inauthentic religion. Inauthentic religion—such as Catholicism and Mahayana Buddhism—was corrupted by superstition and belief in supernatural beings, whereas authentic religion, such as “original Buddhism,” was consistent with rational science. Looking back, we can see that the vision of Buddhism held by the first generation of Buddhist studies scholars was that of the European Enlightenment, an attitude which argued that religion should be rational and consistent with science, grounded in philosophy and ethics rather than in faith and ritual, and tolerant of other religions. The idea that religion should be rational and consistent with science is a feature of modernity. And in the late nineteenth century, these scholars were convinced that original Buddhism was an example of religion in the modern Enlightenment sense. The influence of the European Enlightenment’s vision of religion on Buddhism is still visible in the fact that the Sanskrit term, *budh*, which means “awakening,” is quite widely translated today as “enlightenment.”⁸¹

Second, despite the fact that the Orientalist scholars were attempting to study religion as a science, nevertheless they unwittingly imported what Gregory Schopen calls “Protestant presuppositions” into their research: they valued scriptural text above practice and assumed that popular religious practice was ipso facto corrupt.⁸² As Welter points out, “According to these presuppositions, the Pali canon became the equivalent of the Bible, the dialogues of Śākyamuni paralleled the sermons of Jesus, and the activities of Śākyamuni’s main disciples were reminiscent of the Acts of the Apostles.”⁸³ Despite their intention to be scientific and rational, the Orientalist scholars still unwittingly clung to the premodern association of “religion” with Protestant Christianity.

Third, the Orientalist scholars not only favored the study of texts but used their Pali scholarship as a “protective strategy”⁸⁴ for privileging themselves as authorities on authentic Buddhism and for disenfranchising others. For these scholars, the Pali texts were uniquely important because,

⁸⁰ Rhys Davids 1907, p. 208.

⁸¹ Cohen 2006, pp. 1–3.

⁸² Schopen 1991.

⁸³ Welter 2008, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Proudfoot 1985, p. 199.

as the earliest texts, they were closest to what the historical Buddha taught and were thus less subject to misinterpretation and distortion by later generations of priests. With this claim, the Orientalist academic scholars made themselves the exclusive gatekeepers to authentic Buddhism since their ability to read early Pali texts was the key to the gate. The people who actually practiced Buddhism in the Asian countries became disenfranchised since they did not read the Pali texts. When seen in ideological perspective, the Orientalists' concept of "original Buddhism" functioned politically to draw an insider/outsider line between two groups of people, those who cannot read ancient Pali texts and therefore have no business discussing Buddhism, and those who can read ancient Pali texts and are therefore the judges of authentic Buddhism. D. T. Suzuki's use of satori "reflects" this use of Pali text scholarship. In the Orientalist scholar's understanding, only those who can read the original Pali texts have access to authentic original Buddhism. In Suzuki's understanding, only those who have had the experience of satori are qualified to talk about Zen.

Fourth, in the Orientalists' definition of authentic Buddhism, Mahayana Buddhism—all of the Buddhism of East Asia—was excluded. D. T. Suzuki challenged the Orientalist scholars' hegemony over what counts as authentic Buddhism. In the opening pages of *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, published in 1907, Suzuki clearly identifies the basic assumptions of the Orientalist scholars.

What is generally known to the Western nations by the name of Buddhism is Hīnayānism, whose scriptures . . . are written in Pāli and studied mostly in Ceylon, Burma, and Siam. It was through this language that the first knowledge of Buddhism was acquired by Orientalists; and naturally they came to regard Hīnayānism or Southern Buddhism as the only genuine teachings of the Buddha. They insisted, and some of them still insist, that to have an adequate and thorough knowledge of Buddhism, they must confine themselves solely to the study of the Pāli, that whatever may be learned from other sources, i.e., from the Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Chinese documents should be considered as throwing only a side-light on the reliable information obtained from the Pāli, and further that the knowledge derived from the former should in certain cases be discarded as accounts of a degenerated form of Buddhism.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Suzuki 1907, p. 11.

Suzuki challenged the Orientalists' conception of "original Buddhism" (Suzuki's term is "primitive Buddhism") on several points.⁸⁶ First, consistent with the theory of evolution, the new scientific theory of the day then sweeping the field, Suzuki argued that religion was a living thing and constantly evolving. The Orientalists' "original Buddhism" was only the historical early manifestation of authentic Buddhism. It was the acorn from which would grow a great oak.⁸⁷ In the same vein, he argued that the Buddhist conception of karma was "scientifically verified"⁸⁸ and that the Buddhist conception of non-*atman*, when seen from its positive aspect, was what physical science called "the law of the conservation of energy and of matter."⁸⁹ Second, he wrote to correct misconceptions that people had of Mahayana, such as the meaning of nirvana or the bodhisattva. He took the opportunity to criticize Christians, both for the wilful prejudice of Christian missionaries⁹⁰ and for the inadvertent ignorance of Christian scholars.⁹¹ Finally, in an extended discussion, he argued that there was a "spirit of religion" which manifested itself here as Christianity and there as Buddhism, each a legitimate expression of authentic religion.⁹²

Above these ground-level tactical arguments, Suzuki's general strategy was to "reflect" the Orientalist stance to privileged access. Just as the Orientalist scholars claimed privileged access to authentic Buddhism through Pali text study, Suzuki claimed privileged access to authentic Buddhism through the experience of satori. In Zen terms, he was "taking the enemy's spear and stabbing him with it."⁹³

Cultural Nationalism

I do not agree with, or defend, D. T. Suzuki's claims about Zen and Japanese culture, but I attempt to explain what might have motivated him to make those claims. Briefly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Japanese Buddhism was faced with the task of modernizing itself but it could not do so on a level East-West playing field. In the mid-nineteenth

⁸⁶ Judith Snodgrass has detailed D. T. Suzuki's efforts to establish an "Eastern Buddhism" (Snodgrass 2003).

⁸⁷ Suzuki (1927) 1970, p. 41.

⁸⁸ Suzuki 1907, p. 35.

⁸⁹ Suzuki 1907, p. 43.

⁹⁰ Suzuki 1907, p. 17.

⁹¹ Suzuki 1907, pp. 18–22.

⁹² Suzuki 1907, pp. 23–30.

⁹³ Hori 2003, pp. 55–56.

century, convinced of white European racial superiority, the Western powers forcefully broke the Japanese policy of national isolation, imposed unequal treaties on Japan and China, and in general semi-colonized the two nations. To the Western powers, the Asian nations were barbarian cultures in contrast to the civilized West. To the Asian nations also, the Western countries were barbarian cultures in contrast to civilized Asia. The Western countries however were militarily much stronger and ruthlessly imposed their will on the Asian nations just as they had done to the countries of the Americas and Africa. The Japanese saw the need to modernize and become technically stronger, but they did not want to westernize. They refused to accept Western cultural values, since those values included the assumption that Asia was culturally inferior to the West. In the arena of religion, D. T. Suzuki proposed a new modern Buddhism that showed, he said, the cultural superiority of Japan. In general, in the stance that he took he was “reflecting” the Western powers attitude to Japan.

Suzuki used to say that Zen provided a neutral ground where East and West and the world's religions could meet. “Zen is the ultimate fact of all philosophy and religion. . . . Every religious faith must spring from it if it has to prove at all efficiently and livingly workable in our active life.”⁹⁴ Other religions were inextricably imbedded in local culture, thus preventing people from seeing the truth of religions in other cultures. Only Zen was free of any sort of local culture; it was, in Sharf's language, an “ahistorical, trans-cultural experience of ‘pure subjectivity’ which utterly transcends discursive thought.”⁹⁵ Zen thus was not merely the equal of any of the world religions; it was the experiential core of every philosophy and religion and thus the common ground upon which world religions could meet. At the same time, Zen was the unique possession of Japan. Japanese culture had so absorbed Zen that Zen influenced the national culture and the national character. It was Zen which defined what made the Japanese unique, especially in contrast to Western culture and character.⁹⁶ Thus Sharf concludes, “Suzuki . . . places this understanding of Zen in the interests of a transparently nationalist discourse.”⁹⁷ Thus, what started out looking like a liberal cosmopolitan intercultural platform turns out to be another example of *nihonjinron* 日本人論, a self-congratulating theory of the uniqueness of the Japanese character.

⁹⁴ Suzuki (1927) 1970, p. 268.

⁹⁵ Sharf 1993, p. 1.

⁹⁶ Sharf 1993, pp. 25–26.

⁹⁷ Sharf 1998, p. 101; see also Sharf 1993, pp. 24–25.

I suggest that Suzuki's cultural nationalism was his response to the West's cultural imperialism. He was "reflecting" the West's presumption of cultural superiority. Starting in the premodern period, as it learned more and more about the countries of America, Africa, and Asia, the European West organized its knowledge of foreign cultures and races into a hierarchy in which Europe always occupied a position of superiority. Only the European West had civilization; the other countries of the world were at different stages of being barbarian or savage. At first, Western racial attitudes to the countries of Asia were rather mild and not very prejudiced. For example, in the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries such as Francis Xavier (1506–1552) in Japan and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in China reported that the Japanese and the Chinese had strong cultures and were just as technically advanced as the West.⁹⁸ The Jesuits in China described Confucianism as a noble philosophy on a par with the thought of Greece and Rome.⁹⁹ Significantly, the Jesuits said that both the Japanese and Chinese were white in skin color.¹⁰⁰ At that time, the Japanese and Chinese military were also stronger than the level of military force the Western powers could muster in Asia.¹⁰¹

China considered itself the center of the civilized world and its experience with these representatives from barbarian Europe did nothing to change its mind. In 1640, at the beginning of the Tokugawa period (1603–1868), the Japanese shogunate expelled all foreigners from the country and imposed a policy of national isolation: no foreigners were allowed into the country and no Japanese person was allowed out. The only exception to this policy was the small trading post of Dejima in Nagasaki harbor where the Dutch (and Chinese) were allowed to trade. This policy of national isolation remained in place for two hundred and twenty years.

During this long interlude, the balance of power changed. While Japan and China remained apparently suspended in time, many of the countries of the Western world developed powerful navies that allowed them to extend their military power across the seas to distant foreign countries. England, Holland, France, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, the United States, Germany, and other countries built highly lucrative overseas trading empires in Africa, Asia, and the Americas, sometimes by colonizing entire countries. In the colonial period, when the European powers approached less developed

⁹⁸ Kowner 2014, p. 77.

⁹⁹ Rowbotham 1945, p. 224.

¹⁰⁰ Kowner and Demel 2013, pp. 46–48.

¹⁰¹ Kowner and Demel 2013, p. 11.

countries around the world, it was with an attitude of racial superiority. The Europeans considered the indigenous peoples of their foreign colonies to be uncivilized—they gave off a bodily stench, had barbaric customs, were promiscuous, lacked the ability to think, and were violent and incapable of governing themselves. Extremists went so far as to say that slavery was justified since Africans were subhuman, therefore beasts, and therefore property.¹⁰² White Europeans were naturally meant to lead and dominate the world. These white racist attitudes were buttressed by citations from the Bible, philosophical argument, phrenology, social Darwinism, and theories of scientific racism. Leaders openly argued for white supremacy.¹⁰³

During the Tokugawa period, although the trading ships of the Western powers were refused entry into Japan, Western nations carried on a lucrative trade with China. The Japanese watched the developments in China with fear. The great Western demand for things made in China—mainly tea, but also silks and porcelain—was not matched by a similar demand in China for things manufactured in the West. Western traders paid in silver for Chinese goods, but since the Chinese did not buy anything from the West, the silver never came back to the Western traders. Over time, China accumulated so much silver bullion that there was not enough currency in international circulation to allow other countries to carry on easy trade. Wanting to restore the balance of payments, the Western powers sought for something manufactured in the West which they could sell to the Chinese in large quantities and get paid in silver. They found that something in opium. Although the Chinese emperor had officially banned the import and sale of opium, the British East India Company grew great quantities of opium in India and sold the opium to private traders who then shipped it to China and smuggled it into the country. By encouraging and feeding the appetite for opium in China, the British succeeded in reversing the flow of silver bullion. “Opium . . . flowed freely from all of India to Canton, and by 1836, total imports came to \$18 million, making *it* the world’s most valuable single commodity trade of the nineteenth century.”¹⁰⁴

In China, not only did addiction to opium spread further and further through all levels of society, but in addition, the massive profits to be made caused widespread corruption throughout the government bureaucracy and

¹⁰² Seth 2014, p. 769.

¹⁰³ Kowner and Demel 2013; Kowner 2014.

¹⁰⁴ Wakeman 1978, p. 172.

the merchant class. The British felt no guilt for spreading the addiction and encouraging the corruption. When the emperor sent a special commissioner to Canton to finally shut down once and for all the smuggling of opium into the country, Britain responded by sending its warships in defence of the British traders' right to smuggle opium into China. Britain fought the First Opium War with China during the years 1839–1842. The Second Opium War was fought from 1856 to 1860 with France participating. With superior naval gunpower and disciplined soldiers, the British inflicted humiliating defeats upon the Chinese. The treaties which ended these wars forced China to pay large cash indemnities, open five ports for trade, cede the island of Hong Kong to British control and establish extraterritoriality for Westerners.¹⁰⁵ These were the first of the so-called “unequal treaties” for China. Until that time, China had considered itself the center of human civilization, but the imposition of the unequal treaties introduced what the Chinese call “a century of national humiliation” (Ch. *bainian guochi* 百年國恥).

In Japan, Commodore Matthew Perry of the United States sailed his “black ships” into Uruga Bay in 1853, ten years after the end of the First Opium War and three years before the outbreak of the Second Opium War. He threatened to bombard the capital city of Edo if the Japanese government did not recognize him and enter into serious diplomatic negotiations to open the country to trade. The frightened shogunate acquiesced and the Convention of Kanagawa was signed in 1854, the first of the “unequal treaties” for Japan. This treaty terminated the policy of national isolation and established trading ports for the United States and an American consul position. The treaty in turn led to a series of unequal treaties with other Western powers that Japan was forced into signing—with the United States and Britain in 1854; Netherlands, Russia, and France in 1858; Prussia in 1861; and Austria and Spain in 1868. As Krämer has noted, through the imposition of these unequal treaties, the Western powers in effect semi-colonized Japan¹⁰⁶ and subjected it to great national humiliation.

In these treaties, China and Japan had to concede extraterritoriality to the Western powers. The concession of extraterritoriality signaled the unequal status of China and Japan vis-à-vis the European powers. At the end of the nineteenth century, the European powers had created a typology of nation-states which structured international diplomacy. Fundamental to this structure was the classification of nations into a hierarchy of “civilized,”

¹⁰⁵ Wakeman 1978, p. 212.

¹⁰⁶ Krämer 2015, p. 9.

“barbarian,” and “savage.”¹⁰⁷ Japan was classed as barbarian although it was recognized that if Japan continued to progress in modernization, its status might be rejudged.¹⁰⁸ As a “barbarian” state, Japan did not have the same rights as a “civilized” state.

Even when diplomatic relations have been established between them, the recognition of a semi-barbarous State does not extend to its municipal law, either public or private, except as regards its own citizen within its frontiers. The recognizing States consequently maintain separate courts, exercising separate jurisdiction within the borders of the partially recognized State; and to these courts is intrusted the decision of all questions between the citizens of the recognising States.¹⁰⁹

Practically speaking, if a Westerner in a Chinese or Japanese treaty port committed a criminal act by local Chinese or Japanese law, the Chinese or Japanese police could not arrest that Westerner and try him in a local court. Extraterritoriality meant that the Western power maintained a separate court system which administered Western law even though the treaty port was on Chinese or Japanese soil. As a barbarian state, Japan did not have final legal authority over its own territory.

In its relations and negotiations with the West, Japan constantly sought to show how civilized it was. For example, in 1893 the United States organized the Columbian Exposition, the celebration of four-hundred years since Columbus’s discovery of America. At the exposition, the Japanese government constructed an exhibit hall in traditional Japanese architecture called the “Hōōden” 鳳凰殿, or “Phoenix Pavilion.” It consisted of three wings which Snodgrass describes thus: “The Fujiwara wing showed the elegance and sophistication of Japanese culture centuries before the discovery of America, the Ashikaga wing showed the state of Japanese development at the time of Columbus’s discovery, and the Tokugawa wing showed the continuation of the high level of Japanese cultural tradition up to the arrival of Western influences.”¹¹⁰ The message is unmistakeable: Japan was “civilized” long before America was discovered and the United States as a country was born. The exposition hosted the World’s Parliament of Religions in

¹⁰⁷ Lorimer 1883, p. 101.

¹⁰⁸ Lorimer 1883, pp. 102–3.

¹⁰⁹ Lorimer 1883, p. 217.

¹¹⁰ Snodgrass 2003, p. 33.

Chicago inviting representatives from Christian and non-Christian religions from around the world. One of the Japanese representatives, Hirai Kinzō 平井金三¹¹¹ (1859–1924), connected the unequal treaties, religion, and racial discrimination. He said, not being Christian, the Japanese “are being called heathen; and this is one of the reasons why our rightful claim to revise the treaty, stipulated forty years ago between the Western powers and Japan on an unequal and disadvantageous footing, is still ignored.”¹¹² Japan constantly sought to be accepted into the group of “civilized” nations but was never granted actual acceptance.

In its relationship with the West, Japan always suffered from this Western-based racism institutionalized in the unequal treaties and expressed in the international politics of the day. D. T. Suzuki was born in 1870, two years after the beginning of the Meiji Restoration, and grew up in the new Japan which was struggling to create a modern Japanese national identity for itself. Suzuki’s genius was that he was able to take the West’s demeaning stereotypes of Asia and reverse them to assert the superiority of Asia:

There is truth in saying that the Oriental mind is intuitive while the Western mind is logical and discursive. An intuitive mind has its weaknesses, it is true, but its strongest point is demonstrated when it deals with things most fundamental in life, that is, things related to religion, art, and metaphysics. And it is Zen that has particularly established this fact—in *satori*. The idea that the ultimate truth of life and of things generally is to be intuitively and not conceptually grasped, and that this intuitive prehension is the foundation not only of philosophy but of all other cultural activities, is what the Zen form of Buddhism has contributed to the cultivation of artistic appreciation among the Japanese people.¹¹³

The Orientalist stereotype—the West is logical, the Orient is intuitive—was first used by the Western side to privilege the West. Suzuki took the same stereotype but reversed its polarity making it privilege the East. Bernard Faure pointed out this reversal of Orientalism: “If the Western standpoint represented an Orientalism ‘by default,’ one in which Buddhism was looked

¹¹¹ While Snodgrass (2003) provides “Kinzō” as the reading for his given name, Japanese scholarship seems to read this as “Kinza.” See especially, Yoshinaga 2007, p. 7.

¹¹² Snodgrass 2003, p. 182.

¹¹³ Suzuki 1959, p. 219.

down upon, Suzuki and Nishida, among others, represent an Orientalism ‘by excess,’ a ‘secondary’ Orientalism that offers an idealized, ‘nativist’ image of a Japanese culture deeply influenced by Zen.”¹¹⁴ And Faure also seems to be saying that given the historical context, it is quite understandable that Suzuki should use Orientalist categories in this way. “Admittedly, only a discourse blind to its own conditions of production could blame Nishida (or Suzuki) for using Orientalist categories and chauvinistic rhetoric at the time he wrote—a time when the opposition of East and West had become an all-powerful collective representation.”¹¹⁵ In any case, Suzuki’s cultural nationalism, privileging the culture of Japan, did not arise in a vacuum. It was a “reflection” of earlier Western Orientalist images of Asia.

On Academic Scholarship Today

Who is the judge of what counts as authentic Buddhism? The argument continues today. D. T. Suzuki represents the side of the committed practitioner of Zen. Representing the side of rational objectivity is the scholarship of modern-day academic religious studies.

In 1870, Friedrich Max Müller gave four lectures on *Religionswissenschaft*, “the science of religion,” and published them in 1872 under the title *Lectures on the Science of Religion*.¹¹⁶ This event is often treated as the beginning of the new modern academic study of religion. Whereas previous scholarship often focused on establishing the truth of one religion, the new science of religion would be more secular in outlook. Rhys Davids stated, “The task of the historian of religious belief is . . . simply to ascertain, if he can, the process by which men have come to believe as they do.”¹¹⁷ By speaking of the study of religion as a “science,” Müller meant that religion could be studied without letting one’s personal convictions about true and false religion prejudice judgment. He said: “The very title of the Science of Religion jars on the ears of many persons, and a comparison of all the religions of the world, in which none can claim a privileged position, must seem to many reprehensible in itself, because ignoring that peculiar reverence which everybody, down to the mere fetich [*sic*] worshipper, feels for his *own* religion and his *own* God.”¹¹⁸ Müller took a rigorous stance against

¹¹⁴ Faure 1993, p. 53.

¹¹⁵ Faure 1993, p. 87.

¹¹⁶ Müller 1872.

¹¹⁷ Rhys Davids 1891, p. 8.

¹¹⁸ Müller 1872, p. 7.

such preference for one's own religion: "True reverence is shown in treating every subject, however sacred, however dear to us, with complete confidence; without fear and without favour; with tenderness and love, by all means; but, before all, by an unflinching and uncompromising loyalty to truth."¹¹⁹

This was the creed of the new academic study of religion putting into effect the modernist assumptions of the European Enlightenment. Human reason was sufficient for understanding the world on its own; no miracles, no revelation, and no churchly institution was necessary. At the same time, empirical observation focused on factuality that promised to be objective and free of subjective bias. But despite the rhetoric of "an unflinching and uncompromising loyalty to truth," Müller expected that scientific research in religion would prove the truth of Christianity, albeit an Enlightenment Christianity consistent with science. The great scientific conception in the second half of the nineteenth century was the theory of evolution. In 1859, Charles Darwin had published his influential book, *On the Origin of Species*. Scholars of religion applied the theory of evolution to their own field, classifying the many religions which explorers were discovering in America, Africa, and Asia. But these scholars of religion gave the theory a teleological interpretation. In their view, the pagan religions of barbarian and less civilized societies had the same religious goals as Christianity but were fixed at a lower level of evolutionary development. Thus, Max Müller, although a vocal proponent of the new science of religion, still expected that the science of religion would prove the superiority of Christianity: "I make no secret that true Christianity seems to me to become more and more exalted the more we appreciate the treasures of truth hidden in the despised religions of the world."¹²⁰ Christianity was the ultimate expression of the human faculty for religion. Other religions were struggling to become what Christianity already was. He said, "If we look but steadily into those black Chinese eyes, we shall find that there, too, there is a soul that responds to a soul, and that the God whom they mean is the same God whom we mean, however helpless their utterance, however imperfect their worship."¹²¹ Even in the new "science of religion," the central concept "religion" was still being implicitly defined in terms of a Christian prototype. Even the new secular study of religion

¹¹⁹ Müller 1872, p. 6.

¹²⁰ Müller 1872, p. 22.

¹²¹ Müller 1872, p. 83; see also Cohen 2006, p. 5.

assumed that it could identify authentic religion and that the one authentic religion would be Christianity.

When Sharf describes Suzuki's account of Zen as "invented tradition," the term implies that Suzuki's Zen is not authentic Buddhism. We have seen that when a critic makes a declaration about what is or is not authentic Buddhism, at the same time he often also claims privileged access. An academic scholar these days has a ready-made protective strategy for privileging himself as an authority on authentic Buddhism and for disenfranchising others. He claims to occupy the position of "rational objectivity" and charges that a committed practitioner's judgment will be subjectively biased. Thus, the committed practitioner's judgments are excluded from consideration. But when we compare "rational objectivity" and "Zen experience" as strategic performance, we discover that rather than being opposed to each other, they are, in fact, reflections of each other. Objectivity is held to be a state of mind, a kind of consciousness. So also, Zen experience is held to be a state of mind, a kind of consciousness. According to the rhetoric of objectivity, an objective or rational mind sees things as they are without imposing its own biased point of view—as does Zen experience. Buddhist wisdom is just "seeing things as they are" without self-centeredness. People who are skeptical of rational objectivity doubt that there is such a thing as an objective mind. People who are skeptical of Zen doubt that there is such a thing as the experience of satori. Most important, rational objectivity is used ideologically to draw an insider/outsider line between groups of people. Only those who are "objective" and "rational," such as scholars of religion, are qualified to speak in the academy, while those who are not "objective" or "rational," such as practitioners of a religion, are disqualified. This exactly parallels the "protective strategy" of defenders of religious experience. Only those who have had Zen experience are qualified to speak about Zen enlightenment, while outsiders to the Zen experience are disqualified. If we ignore their content and focus on their political and performative functions, we discover that the rational objectivity of the academic scholar and the non-rational Zen experience of the practitioner perform the same ideological function. Both claim to provide their holders with privileged access to authentic Buddhism.

CONCLUSION

The term "invention of tradition" is not precisely defined, but in nuance it implies an act of manufacturing something without historical precedent and

pretending that it is historical tradition. The term is used pejoratively. Robert Sharf employs the term to describe D. T. Suzuki's account of Zen *satori* which, he argues, is derived more from Western thought than from traditional Buddhism. In the first part of this paper, I have focused on the content of Suzuki's account of *satori*, and using the CBETA database search function argued that Suzuki's account of *satori* closely resembles the concept of *wu* (Jp. *go* or *satori*) in classical Chinese Chan texts: they are both depicted as an event in consciousness and not as ritual process. Thus my conclusion is that Suzuki's account of *satori* is not an "invention of tradition" based on Western sources. It is, in fact, "the tradition" itself based on classical Chan sources.

The second half of the paper considers Suzuki's writings not for their doctrinal content but for their ideological impact. Sharf performs such an ideological analysis and finds that Suzuki promotes a cultural nationalism that depicts the culture of Japan as superior to the West. Here Sharf's ideological analysis does not go far enough. Suzuki was not writing in a historical vacuum. He was born in 1870, two years after the Meiji Restoration. All during the last several decades of the nineteenth century, the Western powers explicitly labelled Japan a "barbarian" country, refused to treat Japan as an equal, and imposed demeaning unequal treaties on Japan, in effect reducing it to semi-colonial status. If Sharf's analysis had adopted a broader focus, it would have shown the historical continuity in Suzuki's ideological position. Suzuki's insistence that only a person who had experienced *satori* knew what Zen was reflected the Orientalist scholars' insistence that only one who could read ancient Pali texts knew what original Buddhism was. They both claimed privileged access to authentic Buddhism. And when Suzuki argued that the West is logical while Asia is intuitive, and that is why Asia is superior, he "invented" that contrast from the longstanding stereotype that the West is logical while Asia is intuitive, and that is why the West is superior. In claiming superiority for Japanese culture, he was "reflecting" the Western powers' assumption of the racial superiority of Europe over Asia. In analyzing the ideological impact of Suzuki's writings, if we see Suzuki in historical perspective, then we will see that rather than "invent tradition," he "reflected" tradition.

ABBREVIATIONS

- T *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 大正新脩大藏經. 85 vols. Ed. Takakusu Junjirō 高楠順次郎 and Watanabe Kaigyoku 渡辺海旭. Tokyo: Taishō Issaikyō Kankōkai, 1924–32.
- ZZ *Shinsan dainihon zoku zōkyō* 新纂大日本統藏經. Ed. Kawamura Kōshō 河村孝照. Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1975–89.

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